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Letter dated 26 June 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith a report on the work of the Security Council during the presidency of Rwanda in April 2013 (see annex).

The assessment report was prepared under my responsibility, after consultation with the other members of the Security Council.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Eugène-Richard **Gasana**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 26 June 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Assessment of the work of the Security Council during the presidency of Rwanda (April 2013)

Introduction

In April 2013, the Security Council held 29 meetings, mainly relating to conflict-specific situations, but also including thematic debates on such matters as conflict prevention in Africa, sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding. Among those meetings, the Council held two open debates, seven briefings, 14 closed consultations, two private meetings and a meeting of troop- and police-contributing countries. Furthermore, the President of the Council convened an informal interactive dialogue on 26 April. Three resolutions were also adopted.

The central thematic session of April 2013 was the briefing on 15 April on "Peace and security in Africa: prevention of conflicts in Africa: addressing the root causes". At that meeting, presided over by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Rwanda, Louise Mushikiwabo, the participants examined how the Council could develop a culture of conflict prevention and considered its day-to-day management of conflicts.

Three resolutions were adopted in April, all on 25 April. The Council adopted a presidential statement on 15 April. In total, eight press statements were issued. Members also agreed on one "elements to the press", delivered by the President of the Council on 18 April.

In preparing the present monthly assessment, Rwanda took note of the note by the President of the Council of 12 December 2012 (S/2012/922), in which the members of the Council reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the Council's work. Specifically, they recognized the usefulness of the monthly assessments in providing as much information as possible on the main aspects of the work of the Council during that month.

Africa

Central African Republic

Council members met in closed consultations on 9 April to discuss the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of BINUCA, Margaret Vogt, provided a briefing to Council members on the situation in the Central African Republic via videoconference from Bangui.

The Special Representative said that the political situation remained highly volatile following the unconstitutional change of power in March 2013. On 31 March, a transitional Government had been created, with the leader of the Séléka rebel coalition and self-proclaimed President, Michel Djotodia, also retaining the minister of defence portfolio. The unconstitutional change in power in Bangui had been unanimously condemned.

Following those developments, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) had convened an extraordinary summit of Heads of State in N'Djamena on 3 April 2013, at which leaders had agreed to put in place a national transitional council that would have the task of electing three leaders: the Head of State, the Vice-President and the President of the National Transitional Council. The National Transitional Council would be given between 18 and 24 months to conduct presidential, legislative and local elections.

The Special Representative commended the Heads of State for putting the Libreville Agreements of 11 January 2013 back on track, saying that the Agreements were essential to restoring legality in the country.

The security situation in the Central African Republic had deteriorated following the seizure of power by the Séléka coalition, characterized by widespread looting, banditry and carjacking resulting from the inability of the new authorities in Bangui to exert control at the political and security levels. The humanitarian situation was likewise deteriorating. Human rights violations were a concern, she said, noting that targeted killings were occurring, as were arbitrary arrests and detentions and rapes. Reports of recruitment of child soldiers by various Séléka factions were of particular concern.

In statements following that briefing, Council members welcomed the outcome of the ECCAS summit on 3 April, reiterating their support for the efforts of the African Union and the United Nations, through BINUCA, to resolve the crisis in the Central African Republic. They condemned the violations of human rights in the country, including sexual violence and the recruitment of child soldiers. In addition, members expressed concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation and called upon the Séléka leaders to guarantee unhindered access to affected persons.

Some Council members expressed the view that the current instability in the country should not impede continuing efforts to combat the Lord's Resistance Army in the region. In condemning the unconstitutional change in power, some members reiterated their support for the African Union and ECCAS on the issue, including by saying that the new political situation in Bangui should not be accepted as a fait accompli. The importance of strengthening cooperation with regional and subregional organizations was emphasized, as was the fact that such cooperation should be consistent and coherent.

On 29 April, following his recent visit to the Central African Republic, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, provided a briefing to Council members in consultations. The security situation was deteriorating and a climate of impunity prevailed, he said. The humanitarian situation was becoming increasingly dire and limited progress was being made to address that trend.

Following the Under-Secretary-General's assessment of the security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, Council members expressed concern at and condemned the continuing violations of human rights in the country. They commended the efforts of ECCAS to address the situation, including the convening of a summit for Heads of State on 18 April in N'Djamena. The decision at that summit to increase the number of personnel of the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic in order to address the deteriorating security situation was welcomed. Members reaffirmed that the Libreville Agreements remained the basis for finding a lasting and peaceful solution.

Following the consultations, the Council issued a press statement in which its members expressed strong concern at the worsening humanitarian and security situation and the weakening of the Central African institutions. They called upon Séléka leaders to ensure that all Séléka armed groups abstained from all violent action and were regrouped without delay into cantonment sites, in accordance with the Libreville Agreements, and called upon all parties to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access. They also expressed serious concern at reports of human rights violations and abuses, emphasizing that those responsible must be held accountable.

Côte d'Ivoire

On 16 April, the Council received a briefing from the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Edmond Mulet, on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). Members then met in closed consultations to discuss UNOCI and receive a briefing from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004) concerning Côte d'Ivoire, Gert Rosenthal (Guatemala).

The Assistant Secretary-General said that Côte d'Ivoire had made progress since the post-electoral crisis and had moved into a new phase of peacebuilding. Nevertheless, the country continued to face threats to its peace and stability, including from those involved in networks affiliated with the former regime. The security situation in the border area with Liberia had improved significantly, although considerable challenges remained. The quadripartite meeting held on 5 April in Monrovia, which had brought together the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, in addition to UNOCI and the United Nations Mission in Liberia, had been a positive development in enhancing cross-border cooperation.

Ahead of the local elections in Côte d'Ivoire that were to be held on 21 April, UNOCI was providing limited support to the Independent Electoral Commission. The former ruling party had chosen not to participate in the elections, efforts to encourage it to occupy its legitimate political space notwithstanding. Concerning the important issue of reconciliation and social cohesion, progress remained slow. It was necessary for the country to bring to justice the perpetrators of serious crimes, regardless of their political affiliation, in order to end the cycle of impunity and to build a culture of accountability.

The Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire said that stabilizing the security situation was a priority on which the consolidation of progress depended. The Government was taking measures in the area of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, including in training and integrating former combatants. National reconciliation was an obligation for his country and the President was committed to combating impunity. If the drawdown of UNOCI went ahead, it should be accompanied by more resources, he said, requesting the deployment of an unmanned aerial system to observe the border area with Liberia.

In consultations, the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004) concerning Côte d'Ivoire summarized the main findings of the Group of Experts contained in its final report (S/2013/228), saying that there had been several violations of the arms embargo during the reporting period and that illegal mining of diamonds had continued.

In their statements, Council members agreed that violations of the sanctions regime might lead to serious security threats in Côte d'Ivoire. Some members welcomed the progress made. Looking ahead to the legislative elections set for 2015, some members said that the emphasis should be on ensuring that they were inclusive, fair and transparent. Several members called for the smooth disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, in addition to further security sector reform. Some members expressed views on the possible use of an unmanned aerial system in the country.

Council members discussed the gradual reduction of the authorized military strength of UNOCI recommended by the Secretary-General and whether the Council should look into further reductions.

On 25 April, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2101 (2013), in which it extended the sanctions measures in place on Côte d'Ivoire by one year, until 30 April 2014, including a notification requirement for the supply of non-lethal equipment to Côte d'Ivoire, a Committee pre-approval requirement for supply of lethal weapons to Côte d'Ivoire and a ban on the supply, sale or transfer of arms and related materiel to non-State actors in Côte d'Ivoire. It also extended the mandate of the Group of Experts until 30 April 2014.

No explanations of vote were made following the adoption of the resolution, although the representative of Côte d'Ivoire, who spoke following the adoption, emphasized his country's commitment to cooperating fully with the United Nations, including the Group of Experts. His delegation hoped that the measures in the resolution would strengthen stability and possibly lead to the partial or complete lifting of the sanctions regime.

Peace and security in Africa (Guinea)

On 25 April, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs provided a briefing to Council members in consultations on the situation in Guinea under "Any other business". He said that the situation in Guinea had become tense in recent months owing to the continued disagreement between the Government and the opposition over the preparations for legislative elections. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the Office for West Africa, Said Djinnit, had been appointed by the Secretary-General as the international facilitator to join the two national facilitators who represented the Government and the opposition.

Tensions had risen in Guinea after the opposition had denounced a presidential decree of 13 April in which legislative elections had been set for 30 June 2013. The opposition had said that the decision had been made unilaterally, without the input of other political parties. An agreement had been brokered on 23 April, in which all parties involved had declared that they would refrain from violent demonstration and committed themselves to resolving outstanding issues through peaceful means. On 25 April, the day of the briefing, one person had been killed and several wounded in clashes between security forces and demonstrators.

Following the briefing, Council members issued a press statement in which they welcomed the signing of the declaration on 23 April and the commitment of the President of Guinea, Alpha Condé, to implementing measures to guarantee peaceful, free and fair elections. They welcomed the engagement of the Special

Representative of the Secretary-General in the dialogue process and stressed that there was a need for political dialogue.

Mali

On 3 April, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs provided a briefing to the Council on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2013/189). He said that one of the highest priorities of the Secretary-General was ensuring that the United Nations helped Mali to resolve the complex crisis that it faced. The most significant development in the political process remained the adoption of a transitional road map. That road map highlighted two priority tasks for the transitional Government: the restoration of territorial integrity and the organization of free and fair elections. While humanitarian access had improved in some parts of Mali, the situation remained volatile, in particular in Timbuktu and Gao.

He briefly discussed the two options proposed by the Secretary-General in his report. Under both options, the United Nations would maintain a strong focus on the political process, including elections and national reconciliation. Under the first option, the Organization would strengthen the United Nations Office in Mali while enhancing the operational capability of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) to conduct stabilization and counter-terrorism operations in parallel. Under the second option, the Organization would deploy a multidimensional integrated stabilization mission, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, with a parallel force conducting combat and counter-terrorism operations.

The Permanent Representative of Mali paid tribute to the French soldiers of Operation Serval and to the soldiers deployed under AFISMA. He voiced support for the second of the two options presented by the Secretary-General. The Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire, speaking on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States, recommended that the Council should authorize the transformation of AFISMA into a United Nations stabilization operation with a robust mandate.

Following the briefing, Council members held closed consultations during which the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, updated members on the letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, in which he had requested the deployment of a United Nations stabilization mission to Mali.

Council members expressed concern at the lack of political progress in Mali and called for an enduring and sustainable solution to the current crisis. They underlined that there was a need for broader dialogue and national reconciliation between political actors and within and across communities, in particular with armed groups that had disassociated themselves from terrorism and were willing to engage in dialogue. Members broadly favoured the second option put forward by the Secretary-General. Members queried the modalities and contours of the parallel force and its possible mandate. They said that the mandate and the proposed size of the United Nations stabilization mission required further discussion, emphasizing that there must be clarity around the mandate assigned to both forces.

On 25 April, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2100 (2013), by which it established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), with MINUSMA assuming responsibility for the discharge of the mandated tasks of the United Nations Office in Mali as from the date of adoption of the resolution. It decided that authority should be transferred from AFISMA to MINUSMA on 1 July 2013 and that AFISMA military and police personnel appropriate to United Nations standards should be included in MINUSMA from that date. It mandated that the phased deployment of MINUSMA would be subject to a further review by the Council within 60 days of the date of adoption of the resolution of the security situation in the Mission's envisaged area of responsibility. One Council member made an explanation of vote, saying that he had voted in favour of the resolution taking into account a relevant request by the Malian national authorities supported by relevant regional organizations.

MINUSMA was mandated to stabilize key population centres in support of the transitional authorities of Mali and authorized to use all means necessary to implement certain tasks of its mandate. It was also mandated to support the transitional authorities of Mali in the implementation of the transitional road map, including with regard to national political dialogue and the electoral process. The mandate also included responsibilities to protect civilians and promote and protect human rights.

The Council also authorized French troops to use all means necessary to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat upon request of the Secretary-General.

Somalia

On 25 April, the Council received a briefing from the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs on Somalia, including on the United Nations technical assessment mission in the country and its findings (see S/2013/239). He said that the Government of Somalia had continued the implementation of its policy of stabilization and peacebuilding and was reaching out beyond the capital in an effort to realize its vision for a federal State, although its approach had not been accepted by all in the country.

In March and April, there had been several reminders of the fragile security situation. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was reaching its operational limits in terms of holding and expanding areas under its control. The anticipated withdrawal of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces would add to the resource strain.

Turning to the Secretary-General's vision of the new special political mission, he affirmed that the new mission would support peacebuilding and State-building in the country. Its core role would be as an enabler, helping to create and to galvanize the political and strategic environment in which stabilization and peacebuilding could proceed. The new mission's areas of focus would include providing good offices, supporting reconciliation efforts and assisting with the mediation of challenges associated with constitutional review and federalism. It would also assist in building national capacity in the security sector and in promoting human rights.

Given the security environment in which it would operate, the mission might be expensive and would require strong support, in particular from the Council. The

essential roles played by the African Union and AMISOM in Somalia were acknowledged, as was the important continuing cooperation with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

The Permanent Representative of Somalia commended what he termed the "clear" and "factual" assessment report, saying that AMISOM had done a good job and that it was time to ensure that the Somali national security forces were able to assume responsibility for eliminating Al-Shabaab, thereby providing stability and security for the country. Somalia had gone through many stages, he said, expressing the hope that the implementation of the recommendations in the assessment report would be realized through the full support of the Council.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia also participated in the briefing. He commended the Council on the adoption of resolution 2093 (2013) and for fielding the technical assessment mission. Efforts to combat Al-Shabaab were far from over. He commended the work of AMISOM, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, saying that the partnership with those regional organizations was crucial to helping the Somali people. Somali national ownership was key. It was critical to support the Somali national security forces so that they could play their role in maintaining peace and security throughout the country.

On the question of the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from regions of Somalia, he discussed the importance of burden-sharing and the effective use of available resources. Ethiopia was ready to discuss the issues further, he said.

During the closed consultations that followed the briefing, Council members welcomed the report of the technical assessment mission, expressing appreciation for the work undertaken by the assessment team. Most agreed that the report represented a new opportunity for United Nations engagement in Somalia and to capitalize on recent gains made. Some members argued that there needed to be a clear division of labour within the new United Nations mission so as to avoid confusion and duplication. That there was a need for the mission to develop strategic partnerships with relevant regional and subregional organizations was also emphasized.

During the consultations, the Under-Secretary-General provided further details on the assessment report, saying that it was inclusive and had been produced in full cooperation with the African Union. On the issue of the integration of the new mission and its timing, analysis was being undertaken by various teams and recommendations would be made in due course.

The resolution establishing the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia was unanimously adopted as resolution 2102 (2013) on 2 May.

Sudan (Darfur)

On 29 April, the Council received a briefing from the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). He reported that the situation in Darfur was troubling and that there could be no military solution to the crisis. Continuing combined efforts of the Council, the African Union and the international community were required in order to persuade the parties involved to reach a fully inclusive political settlement. The Permanent Representative of the Sudan participated in the

meeting and said that, while tribal conflicts in the region had displaced many persons, the situation had been contained.

Following the briefing, Council members met in consultations. They condemned the attack of 19 April on UNAMID forces, which had killed one peacekeeper and injured two others, and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. Some members expressed concern about the capacity of some UNAMID units to conduct their operations and to protect internally displaced persons. Some members also drew attention to the continued restrictions placed on UNAMID, urging all parties not to hinder the Mission's work or that of the humanitarian actors in the region. They also called for the expeditious processing of outstanding visa applications for UNAMID personnel. They requested the President of the Council to convey to the Permanent Representative of the Sudan the concerns of the Council regarding the continued imposition of movement restrictions on UNAMID personnel. That was done later that day.

Council members expressed their support for the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur and welcomed the signing on 6 April of the Doha Document by the Justice and Equality Movement-Sudan. Several called upon rebel groups that had not yet signed the Doha Document to do so and to join the negotiation process. The International Donor Conference for Reconstruction and Development in Darfur, held in Doha on 7 and 8 April, was welcomed by some members. The need for donors to swiftly deliver on their pledges was emphasized.

Sudan and South Sudan

On 11 April, in accordance with resolution 2046 (2012), Council members held one of their biweekly consultations on the Sudan and South Sudan. The Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations provided a briefing on the progress in negotiations between the two States and on the ambush of United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) peacekeepers in Jonglei State, South Sudan, on 9 April.

Concerning oil production, he confirmed that South Sudan had in March instructed oil companies to resume oil production and that oil exports should resume by the end of May 2013. On the humanitarian situation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, the Government of the Sudan had allowed the World Food Programme to undertake a rapid needs assessment, with Sudanese humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations, in locations controlled by the Government in Blue Nile State.

The Sudan had responded favourably to an invitation for its President, Omer Hassan A. Al-Bashir, to meet his South Sudanese counterpart, Salva Kiir, in Juba on 12 April. As to the attack on UNMISS peacekeepers on 9 April, UNMISS had immediately dispatched troop reinforcements following the ambush and a board of inquiry would be set up to investigate the deadly incident.

In statements following the briefing, Council members condemned the attack of 9 April on UNMISS personnel and the killing of the peacekeepers. Members called upon South Sudan to investigate the incident in order to bring the perpetrators to justice. On the implementation of the agreements of 27 September between the two sides, members welcomed the progress made, notably the withdrawal of troops from the buffer zone and the resumption of oil production.

Some members expressed concern about the delay by the Government of the Sudan in beginning negotiations with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), although the imminent start of the negotiations between the two sides was welcomed. Council members raised the issue of humanitarian access in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, welcoming the partial access given to the World Food Programme, although several members also lamented the lack of access to the areas controlled by SPLM-N and expressed the hope that progress would be made on the issue. Some members called for the lifting of unilateral economic sanctions against the Sudan and for debt relief.

On 11 April, Council members held consultations on the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), during which they received a briefing from the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNISFA, Major General Yohannes Tesfamariam. Abyei had remained relatively calm, he said, but the situation was tense, fragile and unpredictable. The engagement of UNISFA had prevented the collapse of the peace process. The lack of police services and government systems had engendered criminal activities in the region, which were escalating.

Concerning the implementation of the matrix signed by the two sides on 12 March, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism had undertaken aerial missions to verify troop withdrawals, as agreed. Both parties were accusing the other of violating agreements to demilitarize the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. He urged the Council to endorse the proposal for additional UNISFA troops to provide protection for the Mechanism and to enable it to address continuing verification challenges, given that UNISFA was stretched to capacity.

Council members largely supported the proposal of the Secretary-General to increase the military component of UNISFA in order to facilitate the Mission's mandate to support the Mechanism. They expressed concern about the intercommunal violence in Abyei and the delay in establishing the temporary arrangements for the administration and security of the Abyei Area. Members urged the Presidents of the Sudan and South Sudan to address and solve the issue when they met in Juba later in April. Concerning the final status of Abyei, divergent views were expressed, with some members saying that the proposal of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel of 21 September, accepted by the Peace and Security Council, provided an equitable solution, and others that a solution necessitated dialogue between both parties on the issue and that external actors could not impose a durable solution.

On 29 April, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan, Haile Menkerios, provided a briefing to Council members in consultations on the Sudan and South Sudan. He said that members of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, established by the Sudan and South Sudan to discuss political and security issues between the two countries, had reaffirmed their commitment to continuing their cooperation in the implementation of the agreements of 27 September 2012. In addition, agreement had been reached to open eight border crossings between the countries. On the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, limited verification activities were being undertaken for logistical reasons. Concerning the negotiations between the Government of the Sudan and SPLM-N, direct talks had begun on 24 April, facilitated by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel. There had been agreement to meet again in May.

In their statements following the briefing, Council members welcomed the improved relations between the Sudan and South Sudan and underlined the need for continuing cooperation towards the implementation of the agreements of 27 September. Members welcomed the planned opening of the eight border-crossing corridors between the two countries, terming it a positive development, while noting that much work remained to be done. The historic visit of the President of the Sudan to South Sudan earlier in April was welcomed by members, as was the two leaders' commitment to the agreements of 27 September. Some expressed concern at the delay in agreeing on the implementation of the interim administrative institutions in Abyei, including the Abyei Area Administration, the Abyei Area Council and the Abyei Police Service, and called upon the two parties to make progress in resolving the final status of Abyei. Some members called for debt relief for the Sudan and South Sudan, in addition to the lifting of unilateral economic sanctions on the Sudan.

Concerning the humanitarian situation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, several members welcomed the launch of negotiations between the Sudan and SPLM-N, although it was noted that the talks had ended without progress. Several members called for an immediate ceasefire to allow humanitarian access. Council members condemned the attack by the Sudanese Revolutionary Front in the Sudan the day following the beginning of negotiations between the Sudan and SPLM-N.

Western Sahara

On 11 April, the Council held a private meeting with countries contributing troops and police to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and received a briefing by the Director of the Asia and Middle East Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat, Izumi Nakamitsu, after which it adopted a communiqué.

On 22 April, Council members held consultations on MINURSO. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, Wolfgang Weisbrod-Weber, and the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Christopher Ross, gave a briefing. The former said that MINURSO military observers were undertaking a significant number of ground patrols each month and that cooperation with the parties was good. The situation in Western Sahara, regional changes witnessed in recent years notwithstanding, remained frozen, the Personal Envoy said. Confidence-building measures, notably family visits and seminars implemented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, had been well received and the number of family visits had increased substantially.

Regarding the issue of challenges to MINURSO, the issue of flags had been resolved and a pragmatic solution was being sought to the issue of license plates, the Special Representative said.

The Personal Envoy emphasized that, given the unstable security situation in the Sahel, a solution to the Western Sahara issue was urgent. The parties remained firmly entrenched in their positions. As Personal Envoy to the Secretary-General, he worked to send the message to the parties that negotiations should be carried out in the spirit of give and take. He would continue the new approach consisting of undertaking shuttle diplomacy, whereby he would consult privately each of the parties and neighbouring States in an attempt to make progress on elements of a

possible compromise or consensual solution. He informed members about his visit to the region from 18 March to 3 April and from 8 to 11 April.

In their remarks following the two briefings, most Council members affirmed that a mutually acceptable political solution was the only lasting solution to the conflict. Several other members voiced support for the autonomy plan put forward by Morocco. A number of members called for improved relations between Morocco and Algeria in order to help to create a good atmosphere for the negotiations. The work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in facilitating family visits between the Tindouf refugee camp and Western Sahara was highlighted and welcomed by members. A number of members referred to the situation in the broader Sahel region and its impact on the conflict.

Some Council members raised the issue of human rights, expressing concern regarding reports of alleged violations in Western Sahara and the Tindouf camps in Algeria. All delegations noted the reforms undertaken by Morocco in the field of human rights, notably the establishment of the National Council of Human Rights, including its commissions in Laayoune and Dakhla, and its cooperation with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. Some members expressed concern about the possible politicization of the issue of human rights in Western Sahara and others about the situation of the population in the Tindouf camps in Algeria, requesting a refugee registration of that population. On the renewal of the mandate of MINURSO, some members expressed their support for the additional military observers and police requested by the Secretary-General.

On 25 April, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2099 (2013), by which it extended the mandate of MINURSO until 30 April 2014.

Middle East

Middle East (Syrian Arab Republic)

On 18 April, the Council held a briefing on the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Council received briefings from the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos; the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres; the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura; and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui. Following the briefings, the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Turkey also made statements.

The Under-Secretary-General said that humanitarian organizations in the Syrian Arab Republic were facing enormous and growing constraints in aiding millions of Syrians affected by the crisis. Aid agencies were facing growing bureaucratic obstacles inhibiting their ability to respond, such as problems relating to authorizations by the Government for convoys, non-governmental organizations and visas. Throughout the country, humanitarian convoys were regularly attacked or shot at, with their personnel intimidated or kidnapped. The Council needed to consider alternative forms of aid delivery, including cross-border operations. If some routes were unsafe, it behooved the parties to identify alternative routes, including across international borders. She urged the Council to request the parties

to ensure the safe and unimpeded access of aid organizations to those in need in all areas of the Syrian Arab Republic and to support cross-border operations.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said that, without an end to the fighting, by the end of 2013 almost half of the population of the Syrian Arab Republic might be in need of humanitarian assistance. If current trends continued, the number of Syrian refugees might reach 3.5 million by the end of 2013, with 6.5 million people inside the Syrian Arab Republic potentially needing humanitarian assistance.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict said that, since her previous briefing, widespread patterns of sexual violations had continued. Both government forces and opposition fighters were abducting women and girls to extract information. The systemic practice of sexual violence in government detention centres, as part of an organized policy against women, men and even children, was appalling. She strongly urged the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Bashar Al-Assad, to ensure that all persons in government custody were treated humanely. The Government had shared with her, in a letter, details of some incidents of kidnapping, sexual violence, torture and other serious human rights violations carried out by opposition fighters. She strongly urged the leadership of the Free Syrian Army and other armed groups to halt such violations and to issue clear directives to commanders throughout their chains of command to prevent sexual violence. Allegations of human trafficking of young women and girls were also on the rise. Expressing deep concern at sexual violence against women and girls in the Syrian Arab Republic and recalling the conclusion of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic that numerous cases of sexual violence could amount to crimes against humanity, she called upon the Syrian authorities to investigate all allegations of sexual violence and to hold each and every perpetrator accountable. It was time for specific action, she said, mentioning her intention to visit the Syrian Arab Republic as soon as possible.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict said that children were one of the groups that had suffered the most in the Syrian conflict, with 3 million already affected. Children had been murdered, tortured and subjected to sexual violence and millions traumatized by the horrors that they had witnessed. The use of heavy weapons in civilian-held areas should be avoided.

In consultations following the briefings, Council members expressed their concern at the deterioration of the humanitarian situation resulting from the Syrian crisis. Members underlined that there was an urgent need to remove obstacles impeding the provision of humanitarian assistance, including bureaucratic obstacles. Some members reiterated the importance of granting cross-border humanitarian access, while others recalled that any humanitarian activities should be carried out in accordance with the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance. Members also reiterated their concern at the increasing number of refugees, which gravely affected the socioeconomic situation, stability and security of the countries neighbouring the Syrian Arab Republic. Members underscored that a political solution to the crisis was needed, with some criticizing those who were frustrating that process. Several members highlighted their concerns about the indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas by the Syrian authorities using Scud missiles. Responsibility for the conflict

was also attributed to opposition forces, including with regard to engaging children in military conflicts. Members welcomed the launch by the Secretary-General of an investigation into the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. They condemned those who violated international humanitarian law and human rights, emphasizing that there was a need to bring perpetrators to justice. Some denounced what they termed "a systematic policy of terror pursued by the Syrian regime" in that regard. Others denounced the armed opposition for its broadened terrorist tactics against civilians.

In consultations on 19 April, members received a briefing from the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi. He said that Syrians were living in constant fear for their personal security, suggesting that a solution to the crisis lay in the Council's hands.

Reflecting on the past two years of international efforts and on the eight months that he had been in his role, he said that he had sought to concentrate his efforts on talking to the parties to the conflict inside and outside the Syrian Arab Republic, and to their backers, and to encourage the Council to unite to effectively support the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria of 30 June 2012 (Geneva communiqué and action plan). He had opted for a Syrian-led plan to implement the Geneva communiqué, although the international community's stand-off had prevented a solution from being reached. He mentioned the resolution adopted by the Arab League on 26 March 2013, in which the Syrian opposition coalition had been invited to represent the Syrian Arab Republic at the Arab League summit on 26 and 27 March.

The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic was becoming more complex by the day: the Government was not ready to listen and the opposition was not united around a credible and constructive political programme. Organizations affiliated with Al-Qaida, such as Jebhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham, continued to grow in strength in the Syrian Arab Republic, with foreign volunteers fighting in their ranks. At the same time, foreign presence on the side of the Government was a reality and Hizbullah appeared to be militarily present in the Syrian Arab Republic and engaged alongside government forces. He stressed that there was a need for the opposition to begin working with others on a political process for the Syrian Arab Republic. In that regard, the initiative of Moaz al-Khatib in February should be further developed and not discarded. On the side of the regime, he underlined that there was an equally urgent need to abandon the dream of a military victory, stressing that no war could be brought to an end through a vague dialogue with mainly the supporters of one's own side.

In their comments following the briefing, some members said that the Council needed to avoid attributing blame for the impasse and instead focus on how to resolve the Syrian crisis based on the Geneva communiqué, noting that the Council had not responded to the Joint Special Representative's request in January to follow up on his suggestions for building on the communiqué. Some Council members reaffirmed that political dialogue was the only means through which the crisis could be resolved and that military solutions would further complicate the situation. Some members expressed the view that the decision of the Arab League to formally grant the opposition representation would only complicate the issue and not facilitate a political settlement.

A number of Council members reiterated that all credible allegations of use of chemical weapons should be investigated, noting that the Syrian regime was blocking access. One member accused some members of doing all that they could to ensure that an investigation of the particular incident in Khan al-Asal reported by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic was not conducted.

Many Council members voiced support for the proposal for a new conference between the Syrian parties so as to give a new impetus to the peace process and reach a much-needed political settlement of the conflict, through a political transition and on the basis of the Geneva communiqué, thus ending the plight of the Syrian people.

Middle East (including the Palestinian question)

On 24 April, the Council held its quarterly open debate on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs provided a briefing to the Council, including on the stalled Middle East peace process, saying that the tragedy in the Syrian Arab Republic made it even more vital for all parties to work collectively to preserve stability in the Middle East. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to deteriorate. He called for swift action to address the humanitarian situation, both inside and outside the Syrian Arab Republic, adding that Jordan and Lebanon in particular needed support given their proximity to the crisis.

There was currently increased risk throughout the Middle East. Rapid action was necessary not only to address the impact of the Syrian crisis, but also to make progress in advancing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, had visited the region in March, affording an important opportunity for both parties to make serious efforts to further peace.

On the Middle East peace process, the United Nations remained committed to working with the parties involved, but much would depend on their political willingness to create conditions conducive to resuming the political process. The financial viability of the Palestinian Authority remained at risk, he said, reiterating the call for it to receive more financial support. The past month had seen an increase in Palestinian casualties, mostly as a result of new clashes with Israeli security forces during Palestinian demonstrations that had grown violent.

On the occasion of Palestinian Prisoners Day (17 April), some 3,000 prisoners had gone on hunger strike for the day. Demonstrations had been held in the main West Bank cities, resulting in 11 Palestinians being injured by Israeli security forces. During the ensuing clashes, the Israeli security forces had killed two Palestinian teenagers and injured two others at a checkpoint near Tulkarem after they had allegedly thrown Molotov cocktails at the checkpoint.

He reiterated that demonstrations must remain non-violent, while urging the Israeli security forces to show the utmost restraint and to ensure the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully and freely. He also expressed concern at the continued developments with regard to settlement activity. Such activity was in violation of international law and could further undermine Palestinians' confidence in the viability of the two-State solution.

In the same vein, he reiterated his strong condemnation of the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel. Indiscriminate rocket firing was intended to sow fear and

cause civilian casualties and could trigger cycles of violence that were difficult to stop. He also called upon Israel to act with restraint, expressing concern about the impact of Israeli restrictions on the civilian population in Gaza.

He expressed concern that the spillover of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be felt in Lebanon, in particular in north-eastern border areas. He deplored several incidents, including rocket attacks and airstrikes from the Syrian side. On the political situation, he noted the designation by the President of Lebanon, Michel Sleiman, of Tamam Salam as Prime Minister and urged Lebanese leaders to continue to engage positively to ensure the early formation of a Government and to respect the President's disassociation policy. He also conveyed the concerns of the Secretary-General about reports of Lebanese fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic, both for the regime and for the opposition, expressing the hope that the new Government would find ways to promote better compliance with the disassociation policy by all sides in Lebanon.

He also echoed Council members' call for swift progress to be made in ensuring a speedy agreement on the electoral law so that timely parliamentary elections could be held on a consensual basis within the legal and constitutional framework.

On the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and along the Blue Line, he said that it had remained generally calm, while adding that the President of Lebanon had twice in April publicly condemned Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace as breaches of resolution 1701 (2006). He reiterated the concern of the United Nations that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon should be fully respected by all parties.

Following the briefing, statements were made by the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations and the Permanent Representative of Israel. Both speakers welcomed the visit of the President of the United States to the region the previous month and expressed their views on the impediments to the peace process. Most Council members also welcomed that visit to the region, expressing the hope that the constructive talks would result in the parties returning to negotiations. Many members condemned the rocket fire from Gaza into Israel, urged Israel and Gaza to uphold the ceasefire between them and encouraged Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza and to halt its illegal settlement activities. Such actions would help to build mutual trust, some members said, and to resolve the humanitarian situation. Some members called for a resumption of the active involvement of the Quartet.

On the Syrian Arab Republic, several Council members expressed alarm at the possible use of chemical weapons in the conflict. Some members said that they were deeply concerned at the use of heavy weapons by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, calling for the Government to be held accountable for its actions. Others expressed concern at terrorist activities among opposition groups. All members, however, voiced concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, emphasizing that a negotiated political solution based on the Geneva communiqué was necessary to end the conflict.

On Lebanon, Council members expressed concern at the consequences of the Syrian crisis, reiterating their support for the dissociation policy of the President of Lebanon and for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. They

welcomed the appointment of Tamam Salam as Prime Minister of Lebanon, calling upon all parties to work towards the organization of parliamentary elections within the constitutional time frame.

More than 20 States Members of the United Nations participated in the open debate. Many welcomed United States efforts for progress towards peace in the Middle East. Several criticized the continuation of what they termed illegal Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory through the expansion of Israeli settlements and the building of the wall of separation. Some members said that the Council had been unable to live up to its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security with regard to the Palestinian question and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Middle East (humanitarian situation in Jordan)

The Council held a private meeting on 30 April at the request of the Permanent Representative of Jordan to discuss the humanitarian situation in the country resulting from the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. Jordan was invited to participate in that meeting. The Council issued a communiqué following the meeting, in accordance with its usual practice.

Middle East (Yemen)

On 4 April, Council members met in closed consultations on Yemen and received a briefing from the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Yemen, Jamal Benomar. The Special Adviser said that, on 18 March, the President of Yemen, Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, had launched the National Dialogue Conference, a significant milestone. The 565 delegates had diverse backgrounds, including women and young people and representatives of political parties and civil society. He praised the leadership of the President of Yemen in convening the event and continuing to implement the transition agreement, which called for a referendum and parliamentary and presidential elections by February 2014.

Addressing the grievances of southerners, which had accumulated for more than two decades, was a significant aspect of the Yemeni political transition. The Security Council's mission to Yemen in January 2013 and its presidential statement of 15 February 2013 (S/PRST/2013/3), in addition to close interaction with the Gulf Cooperation Council and the European Union, had yielded positive results in the country.

Council members welcomed the launch of the National Dialogue Conference on 18 March, saying that it afforded an historic opportunity for the Yemeni people, including women and young people, to come together to resolve grievances and to build trust, ensure that justice was served, strengthen human rights and contribute to national development and prosperity. Members acknowledged, however, that serious challenges remained in the transition, including addressing the grievances of southerners. Some members welcomed the visit of the President of Yemen to the southern port city of Aden in February as an indication of his commitment to resolving southerners' fundamental grievances. Some members also emphasized the importance of the territorial integrity of Yemen and national sovereignty. Members voiced concerns at the activities of Al-Qaida in the country.

Asia

Myanmar

On 16 April, Council members held closed consultations on Myanmar and received a briefing from the Special Adviser on Myanmar, Vijay Nambiar. It was the first time that the Special Adviser had given a briefing to members since 20 June 2012 and, since then, he had visited Myanmar five times, most recently from 21 to 25 March. In his briefing, he said that, while the continuing political reform policies implemented by the Government were resulting in the strengthening and consolidation of democratic institutions, political progress could be undermined if negative forces in the country were not controlled.

The parliament had established key rule of law and judicial institutions and there was increased transparency in parliamentary discussions on financial and budgetary questions. Concerning negative factors that might undermine the political progress, the violence in 2012 in Rakhine State had resulted in large numbers of internally displaced persons, most from the Rohingya community. It was critical for the Government to address the dire humanitarian situation in the camps before the arrival of the monsoon season. Regarding the tension between the Government and the Kachin Independence Organization, he was optimistic that a mutually acceptable political solution could be found.

Council members commended the Special Adviser on his work and welcomed his briefing. On the political progress made, members commended the work undertaken by the Government, with some encouraging the Government to continue to work with the opposition. Members urged the Government to address the growing tensions and violence between Muslim and Buddhist communities. They also expressed their concern at the humanitarian situation in the camps for internally displaced persons, as discussed during the briefing, and urged the international community to assist the Government with humanitarian relief.

Regarding the political situation in Kachin State, members commended the efforts made by both parties to negotiate a solution, while noting that concerns remained. Divergent views were expressed on the extent to which the international community should be involved in negotiations within Kachin State between the two sides. The Special Adviser said that the Government was actively addressing the issue of children being used in the military and that there was enhanced awareness of the issue, but that lack of access to non-State armed groups remained a constraint.

Thematic issues

Peace and security in Africa

On 15 April, the Council held a high-level briefing on "Peace and security in Africa: prevention of conflicts in Africa: addressing the root causes". The meeting was presided over by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Rwanda, Louise Mushikiwabo. The Secretary-General participated in the meeting, as did the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia, who represented the Chairperson of the African Union. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Togo was also in attendance.

As President of the Council, Ms. Mushikiwabo said that the briefing aimed at examining how the Council could move from a day-to-day management of conflicts to develop a culture of conflict prevention through skills, mechanisms and institutions that addressed the root causes of conflicts in Africa. The important role of the African Union in identifying the root causes of conflict in Africa was underscored, as were the roles of the institutions and mechanisms established to address those causes. It was necessary for the Council to strengthen its cooperation with the African Union and African subregional organizations.

The Secretary-General said that conflicts arose from poor governance, human rights abuses and grievances over unequal distribution of resources, wealth and power, rendering it necessary to tackle those issues. The Organization's efforts throughout Africa were benefiting from reinvigorated regional organizations, which were playing a stronger strategic role as key partners.

The Permanent Representative of Ethiopia, speaking on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union, said that Africa had made significant progress over the past decade. He underscored that Africa bore the primary responsibility for its own peace and development, remarking that it took the lead in its subregions in addressing and preventing conflicts.

Several members said that the root causes of conflict included a lack of good governance, economic, political and social marginalization, poverty and the lack of rule of law. Some members said that, while the immediate causes of conflict were sometimes simple to identify, the root causes were more complex and many rooted in the legacy of colonialism.

The Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2013/4) in which it recognized the importance of a comprehensive strategy comprising operational and structural measures for prevention of armed conflicts and encouraged the development of measures to address the root causes of conflicts in order to ensure sustainable peace. The Council also underlined the importance of partnership and cooperation between regional and subregional organizations in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter.

Women and peace and security

On 17 April, the Council held a high-level open debate on women and peace and security to discuss the report of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict (S/2013/149). The meeting was presided over by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Rwanda, Louise Mushikiwabo. The Secretary-General provided a briefing to the Council, as did the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Saran Keïta Diakité made a statement on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.

The Secretary-General said that the United Nations had to use all the tools at its disposal to address the negative trends associated with wartime rape. Such trends underscored the need to address sexual violence during ceasefire negotiations, peace processes and security sector reform.

The Special Representative discussed her recent visits to the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, describing sexual violence atrocities. She said that the Council must send an unequivocal message that sexual violence in conflict would not be tolerated and that the full force of

international order would be brought to bear to ensure accountability. She also emphasized the importance of prevention and responsibility.

Ms. Keïta Diakité said that effectively addressing the complexities of sexual violence in conflict required powerful and urgent leadership at all levels. Achieving sustainable peace and the elimination of sexual violence in conflict would continue to be impossible if the root causes of inequality were not addressed. There was a devastating link between the flow of arms and the perpetration of sexual abuse. She called upon States to uphold their commitments regarding women, peace and security in all disarmament processes.

Ms. Mushikiwabo noted that rape and sexual assault were key elements of genocide ideology used to punish, humiliate and dehumanize victims, their families and communities. She called upon the international community, non-governmental organizations, civil society, faith-based organizations and other non-State actors operating in affected areas to support the reporting and investigation of sexual crimes.

In addition to the Council members, dozens of delegations from the wider United Nations membership participated in the full-day meeting, totalling more than 60 speakers. Many delegations voiced support for the recommendation by the Secretary-General in his report to address sexual violence during peace negotiations, security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes.

Post-conflict peacebuilding

On 25 April, the Council held a briefing on post-conflict peacebuilding to discuss the report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its sixth session (S/2013/63). The Permanent Representative of Bangladesh and former Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Abulkalam Abdul Momen, provided a briefing to the Council, as did the current Chair of the Commission and Permanent Representative of Croatia, Ranko Vilović.

The former Chair of the Commission highlighted some of the Commission's country-specific engagement with the six countries on its agenda (Burundi, the Central African Republic, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone), including support for the launching of a national reconciliation strategy in Liberia, the successful conduct of elections in Sierra Leone and a new poverty reduction strategy in Burundi. Those achievements notwithstanding, the Commission's full potential remained unrealized and would remain so without further commitment by the membership.

The Chair of the Commission focused his comments on the interaction between the Council and the Commission, saying that there was a need for further elaboration and exchange of views on where the Commission's advice would be of most value to the Council and how the latter could best engage with the Commission.

Council members commended the work of the Commission and its current and former leadership. Several members said that, while there were commendable success stories, the Commission had not fully realized the mission that it had been assigned at the time of its establishment, pointing to the recent developments in the Central African Republic as an illustration of that. Several members recommended that the Commission should focus on national priorities, including economic